

Happiness Pursued

Proverbs 16:20

“He who heeds the word wisely will find good, and whoever trusts in the LORD, happy is he.”

The Constitution of the United States guarantees its citizens the right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." **But you don't need to be a Rocket Scientist to know that Americans aren't happy.** The American Public Health Association reports that *unhappy, ineffective* and *upset persons* make up about one-third of the population of the United States. If those statistics are even approximately correct, America is in trouble, and deep trouble at that.

With each passing day we are discovering that in the age in which we live, conditions are becoming worse instead of better. We represent *six percent of the world's population* and take *ninety percent of the world's tranquilizers*. The truth of the matter is that **we are a nation of miserable people!**

Americans today make more money, have better houses, eat better food, drive better cars, and enjoy more opportunities than any other generation. Yet, **we are pursuing happiness frantically.** Something to **swallow.** **Something to sniff.** Something to **smoke.** Something to **spend money on.** In fact, the **search for happiness** itself winds up being **one of the chief causes of unhappiness.**

The more knowledge we acquire, the less wisdom we seem to have. The **more economic security we attain, the more corruption we generate.** The **more pleasure we enjoy, the more disenchanted we become with ourselves, our spouses, our children and our destiny.** Most folk will agree that we are in need of **a transfusion of spiritual and moral energy** for our sick society.

I guess the first question that we need to ask ourselves is, “What is happiness?”

The sick man would say happiness is health. The ambitious man would say happiness is success. The poor man would say happiness is wealth. The scholar would say happiness is learning. And the man who works 60 to 80 hours a week would say happiness is rest and relaxation. But none of these things produce lasting happiness.

Happiness is not haphazard. That is, happiness does not come our way by accident. People who think happiness is accidental, that it drops out of the sky like rain, forget that even rain is not accidental. It is given by the hand of God.

As we seek to find happiness, there is one truth that we must remember: Nothing that comes from the outside can satisfy the soul on the inside. Happiness is not a product of our environment, but a state of condition of our spiritual and mental processes. Real happiness is not produced by pleasant surroundings, but is generated by a “happy” condition which already exists within the heart. Happiness is not something we carry in our hands. Happiness is something we carry in our hearts! In other words, our state of happiness is the result of an inward spiritual atmosphere which always remains constant and unchanging in the midst of an ever-changing and unpredictable atmosphere around us. Therefore, no matter what our outward conditions might be, we always have an unchanging relationship with God that governs our ventral being.

I stand before you to proclaim the time to be happy is now. The place to be happy is right where you are.

But, first of all, we need to begin our study by understanding where happiness is NOT found.

I guess the truth-of-the-matter is that we all pursue happiness. It comes naturally. The problem is that we keep looking for it in all the wrong places.

Happiness is not found in RELIGION. Now, we need to distinguish between *religion* and *Christianity*. *Religion* is nothing more than *pretense of godliness* held together with the *glue* of *idolatry*, *ritual rules* and the *traditions of men*.

Religion is form without force. It is *ceremony* without *change in conduct* or *character*. It thrives on *human traditions that exclude the commandments of God*.

Religion is rich in tradition but poverty-stricken where love, joy and peace are concerned. *Tradition* is a *religious rut*. Ruts are easy to follow, but you can only go where others have gone. What if God wants to do a new work in your life? If you are stuck in a rut, you'll miss it!

Tradition holds to the past. It resists *change*. But the path that leads to *spiritual maturity*, and to *happiness*, demands *change*.

When Jesus healed the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath, the enraged Pharisees approached Him, fists clenched, teeth grinding, screaming, "We have a tradition! You can't heal on the Sabbath!"

In their religiosity, they were prepared to let the man remain crippled just to preserve their tradition. Jesus asked this searching question in Matthew 15:3, "Why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?"

Tradition stunts spiritual growth. It destroys the *adventure of faith*. It squashes the *fresh move of the Holy Spirit*. It produces immature saints who become *diaper dictators* with *pabulum personalities*!

Religion is intolerant of those who don't fit our form. Our **attitudes of intolerance** are manifested in **sustained stares** or **critical comments**. Such religious reactions will destroy churches faster than a five-alarm fire. Paul rebuked the Galatians thoroughly for deserting Christ (Galatians 1:6), for setting aside the grace of God (Galatians 2:21) and for becoming bewitched by legalism (3:1).

Jesus reserved His most scathing remarks not for struggling sinners but for religious legalists who pursued a form of godliness while denying the power of God. They were **pompous peacocks**, **hypocrites** and **glory-hogs** who had an inner compulsion **to be the center of attention**. Their **descendants are still with us today**.

If there is something within you that instinctively criticizes people who do not fit your mold; something that compels you to look down your nose at those who disagree with you; a compulsion for having your talents and accomplishments on display at all times - you are in danger of becoming a modern-day Pharisee. And Pharisees are never happy.

Happiness is not found in the GOLDEN RULE. Did you know that the Golden Rule is a fraud? **That's right.** Listen to me carefully, **without the character of Christ in the life of the person quoting the rule; there is no greater fraud on the face of the earth!**

Let me explain what I mean by such a statement. The drunk who buys a drink for another drunk is practicing the Golden Rule without the character of Christ. He is doing for another what he wishes others would do for him: help him get drunk. **Likewise, the drug addict sharing a fix with another addict is practicing the Golden Rule without the character of Christ.** And so on.

In Luke 6: 31 when Jesus said, "Do unto others as you would have them do to you," He was teaching what has become known as "the

Beatitudes." And in that context, Jesus was giving instructions on allowing the love of God to flow through us to others.

Our deeds are a reflection of our desires, which reflect our character. We and we alone are responsible for our deeds. There comes a time in the life of each one of us when we must assume responsibility for who we are and what we do. We can't blame mother, father, professor, boss, preacher or God.

We are living in a time when we are hearing a lot of professionals use the term "peer pressure." It is indeed true that many of our young people are under a great amount of peer pressure to participate in certain activities, to wear certain clothes, to go to certain places, and to give in to certain temptations. While all of that is certainly true, it is still the responsibility of the person himself to make the decision to say "yes" or "no."

This same truth is found in the lives of adults, who have sought to cover up their lack of commitment to the Lord and church, by blaming someone else, instead of being honest with themselves. We blame pastors, deacons, Sunday School teachers, etc. But, listen, if you are not happy where you are, go some place else. **If you can't be happy here find you another church to worship and serve the Lord.** But don't just sit at home and blame someone else while you do nothing!

I guess the other side of this truth is that too many try to find happiness in "DOING." What do I mean by a statement like that? Simply this, I honestly think that many people are miserable and they are trying to find some comfort in their many involvements of religious activities! **And the problem with that is that pretty soon the "doing" becomes the problem.** Why? Because it presents a burden on our time and energy.

Happiness is not found in TOMORROW. Much happiness is assassinated by "waiting for tomorrow." How many times have I heard people postpone the joy of life by saying things like:

"I'll be happy when I get older." Then when they get older everything hurts - and what doesn't hurt doesn't work!

"I'll be happy when I get married." Then they get married and discover that, although everyone gets married for better or worse, not everyone gets married for good.

"I'll be happy when I have children." Then they have children and discover there are three ways to get something done: do it yourself, hire someone to do it for you, or forbid your kids from doing it.

"I'll be happy when I retire." Then they find out that the only bad thing about doing nothing is that you never get a day off.

Today is the tomorrow you talked about yesterday. You are exchanging one day of your life for it. When the sun sets, what will you have to show for it?

Happiness is not found in religion. Happiness is not found in "doing." Happiness is not found in tomorrow.

Happiness is a result of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Paul says in Galatians 5:22-23, "The fruit of the Spirit, is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

The truth of this matter is this - If you have received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, you already have everything you need to have a joyful life. You are loved by a heavenly Father who has promised to supply all your needs. You are sealed with the Holy Spirit Who is your guarantee of going to Heaven. **No wonder the Bible repeatedly commands us to be thankful.** If you really want to be

happy, learn to be thankful for whom you are in Christ Jesus and stop
lusting after what you do not have.